



The Graduate School of Political Management





ONLINE CAMPAIGNING 2002: A PRIMER

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The Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet encompasses the Democracy Online Project, which published the first edition of this Primer in 1999, and a second edition in 2000. This Primer is based on Institute conferences, surveys, interviews, and field research, as well as news reports and academic studies.

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The Institute is a research and advocacy initiative to promote the development of online politics in a manner that upholds democratic principles and values. One of the Institute's main goals is to help establish the Internet as a locus for trustworthy information and civil discussion of public affairs, with an initial emphasis on campaigns for elective office in the United States.

For more on the Institute's activities, please visit our web site at www.ipdi.org.
For more on the Graduate School of Political Management, see www.gwu.edu/~gspm.
For more on The Pew Charitable Trusts, see www.pewtrusts.com.

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FORWARD

July 29, 2002

Dear Candidates and Campaign Professionals,

This new version of our primer, *Online Campaigning 2002*, is the most detailed and substantive one yet. It highlights useful ideas that emerged from the 2000 election and incorporates recent scholarly research on what actually works on political Web sites. Based on these changes, we have revised several of the Best Practices and added a new one, *Make Your Site Accessible to Everyone*.

Our Best Practices aim at finding the intersection of smart politics and civic responsibility. Take accessibility, for example. By making your campaign Web site accessible to the 20 percent of Americans with disabilities, you also make your site easier to download for the 80 percent of the online public without residential broadband connections who rely on slower phone modems. The right move, from a strategic perspective, is the same move that engages the citizenry.

You may have noticed that the new Primer is published under the aegis of the Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet (IPDI). Our newly chartered Institute comprises the Primer's previous publisher, the Democracy Online Project, as well as the Congress Online Project, and the Democracy Day Project.

The mission of IPDI is to foster the use of the Internet to improve American politics. The Institute documents and analyzes the evolving use of the Internet in politics; develops and advocates best practices in online political conduct; identifies and promotes awareness of critical public policy choices regarding the Internet, politics and democracy; and serves as an informational resource for candidates, officeholders, political professionals and activists, journalists, scholars, and citizens.

We urge you to incorporate the principles underlying our Best Practices into your campaign Web site and to take the pledge found on the inside back cover, "We support the IPDI Best Practices for Online Campaigning." All candidates who sign the pledge and fax it back to us at 202.994.6006 will be listed on a Best Practices Honor Roll prominently displayed on the Institute's Web site, www.ipdi.org.

Please check out our Web site for additional copies of the Primer in PDF, more information, links to useful resources, and other ideas for your Web site. And forward your good ideas to us; we'll post them on our Web site (with appropriate credit, of course) for others to consider.

Sincerely,

Carol C. Darr
Director



INTRODUCTION

By the end of 2001, according to the UCLA Internet Report (ccp.ucla.edu), 72.3 percent of Americans (approximately 200 million people) were going online. That simple fact makes an Internet strategy imperative for political campaigners seeking elective office in the United States. By an Internet strategy, we mean a plan of action to reach and engage targeted segments of this huge online public.

But a good Internet strategy is no simple matter. Uploading campaign materials constructed for other media onto a Web site will accomplish little and grow stale fast. A campaign Web site has its own logic of presentation. When Net users see “brochureware,” they move on, disappointed. Furthermore, the Net encompasses much more than a campaign Web site. Four other components and channels of the Internet must be strategically considered: the rest of the Web, where ads and other links to the campaign site may be placed; e-mail, a vital conduit for fund-raising, press relations, and the recruitment and mobilization of volunteers; text messaging, which is increasingly valuable for campaign coordination and alerts during big events, including Election Day; and a campaign database containing e-mail lists, archived statements, public feedback, and computer-processed reports. Each of these five moving parts of a Net operation must be oiled and integrated, not just with the other parts but with the campaign’s offline communications.

This Primer will help you, the political campaigner, create, execute, and fine-tune an Internet strategy. (We include advice for low-budget campaigns.) All of our suggestions are grounded on research and experience. They are also predicated on the assumption that what’s good for you, as a campaigner, and what’s good for democracy, as the textbooks enshrine it, have a surprising amount in common. We call our major recommendations “best practices,” and we mean “best” in both the moral and the strategic sense of the word.

We offer two primary justifications for equating civic ideals with political effectiveness.

The first reason is that online communication is user-driven. For the most part, you can’t insert yourself before the people through this medium today. It’s up to them to decide whether to click open your advertisement, check out your Web site, sign up for

your e-mail letters, spread the word about your campaign, and so forth. Since most Americans are idealistic when it comes to politics, you need to appeal to their cherished beliefs about how campaigns should be run when you venture online in search of their support.

The second reason best practices will enhance both your campaign and our democracy is that online communication is very public. Whatever you put on your Web site (and, to a lesser but still considerable degree, in your e-mails) will be accessible to the media, your opponents, and the global online population – today and tomorrow. You can take down whatever you put up, but you cannot eliminate the possibility that someone has downloaded your Net offerings into a computer’s memory. And whatever has been downloaded can be forwarded everywhere in a short time.

The Internet, in short, is not a good “stealth medium.” Direct mail, phone calls, and the old-fashioned whisper have served as outlets for low blows, exaggerations, and even lies, because when messages are shipped through these pipelines, they mainly reach those targeted to receive them. It is hard to re-ship a piece of mail. It is child’s play to re-ship e-mail.

Moreover, the endless space on the Internet presents a marvelous opportunity for candidates who wish to explain their positions in full. It also stands as a potential rebuke to those who rely on the time, space, and cost limitations of radio and television spots to make facile and sometimes misleading arguments. The Internet may turn out to be as vast a wasteland as television. But because it is user-driven and very public, and increasingly well-indexed to boot, campaigns and citizens can zoom to online oases whenever they choose.

The Internet will not eliminate dirty, reckless, or otherwise underhanded campaigning. But it can archive much of it and make room for civil campaigning, so that truth and fairness have a better chance of catching up. In fact, IPDI will be working with one such archive this fall to monitor campaign Web sites and e-mail on a periodic basis.

All the more reason for you to read on...



THE IPDI BEST PRACTICES PLEDGE

We have organized this Primer into two interwoven parts. The main text proceeds according to a sequence of questions likely to occur to you. We have also developed seven general principles of good online political communication. These **Best Practices** are discussed in sidebar essays. A checklist with specific ways to implement the Best Practices appears at the end of the Primer.

We invite your campaign to pledge its support for the Best Practices by faxing a signed form with the following sentence to the Institute at 202.994.6006:

"We support the IPDI Best Practices for Online Campaigning."

A form appears at the end of this Primer. A list of supporting campaigns will appear on IPDI's Web site this fall.



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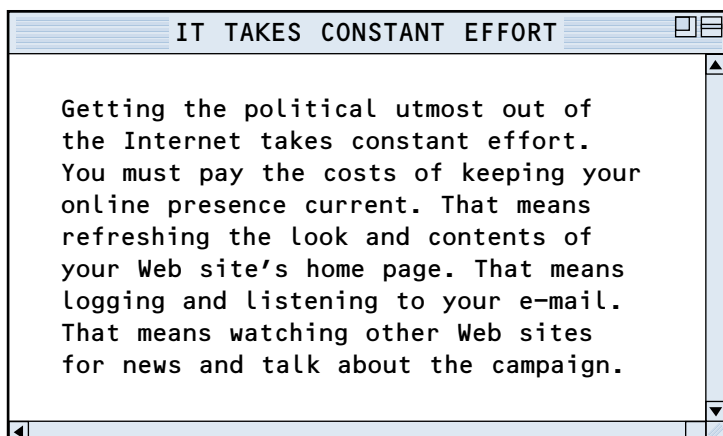
*WE HOPE YOU FIND THIS
PRIMER STIMULATING
AND USEFUL. ALTHOUGH
IT WILL NOT ANSWER ALL
OF YOUR QUESTIONS, IT
WILL HELP YOU ASK THE
RIGHT QUESTIONS, AT THE
RIGHT TIMES, OF THE RIGHT
PEOPLE. IF YOU HAVE A
QUESTION OR COMMENT
FOR US, WE'RE AT
WWW.IPDI.ORG.*

WHAT CAN THE INTERNET GIVE MY CAMPAIGN, AND WHAT MUST I DO TO GET IT?

Skeptics of online politics dismiss the Web as a campaign tool, claiming it does not deliver messages. The humblest yard sign, they say, reaches more of the people you want, when you want them, than the coolest Web site. So why bother doing anything more online than is necessary to neutralize the charge that your campaign is not in technological step with the times?

We have already agreed that the Net is user-driven, a discomfiting state of affairs for spin-meisters accustomed to mass media levels of control over the production and distribution of campaign messages. However:

- *The Internet can put your campaign message in the workplace better than any other medium.* Learn to target and pitch to the online public, and you will find your campaign taken seriously as nowhere else, because many people access the Internet with work, not entertainment or commuting, in mind. Activists, journalists, researchers, and interested spectators are especially clued into what you have to say to them through the Internet.
- *The Internet can serve as a campaign force multiplier at crucial moments.* Be ready for a rush of online visitors when your campaign makes the news, and you will be able to rapidly convert the spike in interest into buzz, money, and volunteers.



When members of the online public encounters your campaign message, their hands are already poised for action.

- *The Internet can save you time, money, and the headaches of repeated mistakes.* Deploy your campaign online in the right ways, and you will reap administrative efficiencies along with invaluable feedback. For example, the Internet can supply the correct answer to a frequently asked question about your campaign in perpetuity, thereby saving you labor costs. Meanwhile, it can also report back how many times the question has been posed to your campaign, pinpointing an opportunity to enhance your message and your relations with the public.

These assets can provide the winning edge in a close race. They can constitute a platform for political support that will not have to be reconstructed from scratch the next time you need it. However, like an Internet strategy, an Internet operation does not come bundled into the computer. Getting the political utmost out of the Internet takes constant effort. You must pay the costs of keeping your online presence current. That means refreshing the look and contents of your Web site's home page. That means logging and listening to your e-mail. That means watching other Web sites for news and talk about the campaign.

To accomplish these and similar operational tasks, you will need to put together a team within your campaign team, dedicated to the online aspects of your efforts. You will also need to devise a set of routines to follow for them and others with access to your Net operation. Finally, you will need to give at least one member of the online campaign team a seat at the proverbial table where top campaign decisions are made.

A Net strategy, team, and set of routines will enable you to succeed in both the "real time" of crucial moments and the time span of a political career, as well as the time period designated by that strategy as your frame for action. Which begs the question:

HOW LONG A LEAD TIME DO I NEED BEFORE I OPEN MY WEB SITE?

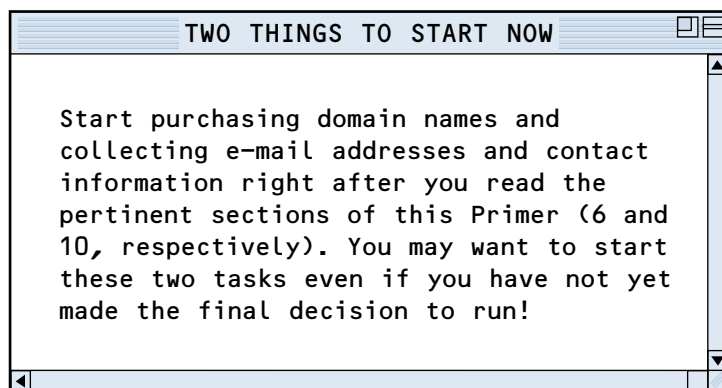
You should start campaigning online as soon as you procure the minimum equipment and services described in the next section. There is no sense in waiting until everything you plan to do has been tested and set right. Start purchasing domain names and collecting e-mail addresses and contact information right after you read the pertinent sections of this Primer (6 and 10, respectively). You may want to start these two tasks even if you have not yet made the final decision to run!

Speaking of final decisions, it is important to appreciate that you will never get an online message "ready to go" in the same way you prepare a print newsletter or radio spot. On the Internet, messages keep changing as they are released into circulation. Your readers/listeners/viewers can modify your message's distribution and even its form and contents. (We discuss how to handle those annoying parody sites in Best Practice E.) You should prepare to track these public responses (or lack thereof), and be ready to modify your messages accordingly.

Information about you already exists online. Your name is already indexed by online search engines. The closer you move toward a candidacy, the more information pertinent to your campaign there will be online. So you may as well jump in the digital pool and start to swim, with your eyes open to how others react to the splashes you make.

That said, the debut of your campaign Web site ought to be pitched to the press and public as an event and scheduled as close to, if not coincidental with, your formal declaration of candidacy. On opening day, the home page, especially, must be ready to go in the old media sense. The adage about the power of first impressions applies in force on the Net. Visitors to your site will decide to stay or go in 10 to 20 seconds, and the disappointed rarely return.

Therefore, allow some lead time to test your home page and those pages one click off that home page. Put a stopwatch to your home page's download time on a slow modem. Eliminate links to pages yet to be filled; "under construction" and "coming soon" look bad. Ask people from your campaign's inner and outer circles and representatives of your target groups to search the Web for your home page, and



view it with a critical eye. Their pre-opening reactions will help you sharpen your content, eliminate kinks in accessing and navigating the site, and come up with other improvements.

When you have a strong home page, it is no great disaster if you discover minor errors elsewhere after your opening day. You will want to make changes anyway.

WHAT EQUIPMENT, SOFTWARE, AND TECHNICAL SERVICES DO I NEED?

As you figure out what you want to do online and how much you can spend, you should price equipment, software, and technical services. Our list of minimum expenditures and in-house assignments may look long, especially for state and local candidacies. However, many of these items come in packages, and many of the assignments can be combined.

The Basic Operation

- Pentium III computers with printers for key staff.
- One or two laptops for field work.
- Personal digital assistants (PDAs) for the candidate and entourage.
- A good digital camera.
- Broadband Net access for the campaign headquarters.
- Database software for list management.
- An e-mail list provider for people who sign up on your Web site.
- A company to provide the campaign Web site hosting, domain names, and e-mail boxes.
- A secure system to process contributions and sign-ups (subcontracting this is a good option).
- Someone to design the Web site and assure connectivity with the campaign database and other components of the online operation.

< Best Practice A >

MAKE YOUR WEB SITE ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE.

There are two groups of citizens who require special accommodations to access your Internet campaign: those with disabilities and those whose primary language is not English. You should take extra steps to ensure that you have access to their ideas, dollars, volunteer hours, and votes.

Technological barriers frustrate many people, but they humiliate individuals with disabilities. Between 10 percent and 20 percent of all Americans suffer from a disability that interferes with their daily life. Some of them, such as the physically impaired, want to rely on the Internet as a primary source of information and may have more time than the average person to devote to online volunteering. Yet another bonus: some of the same technology that allows more disabled people to access your Web site will make it easier for people without broadband connections to access it, too.

A sensible course of action for an online campaign with respect to the disabled is to voluntarily follow guidelines established by the federal government. Federal legislation that became enforceable in June 2001 requires that all federal agencies use technology (including telephones and Web sites) that is readily accessible to individuals with all forms of disabilities. This Section 508 legislation (the law referenced is the Work Force Investment Act) means that if a visually impaired individual contacts an agency's Web site, the Web site's basic design must facilitate the communication. Ways of satisfying the requirement include the usage of text versions of multimedia files, voice-recognition software, descriptive text tags in HTML programming language for images, and a no-frames version of the site.

Although Section 508 applies only to federal agencies, and neither to Capitol Hill nor to political campaigns, its effect has been to produce a readily available range of compliant products. (For leads, see the Web Accessibility Initiative section of the Web site of the World Wide Web Consortium, at www.w3.org/WAI.) One well-known accessibility checker, developed by the Center For Applied Special Technology (CAST), is a program called Bobby (www.bobby.cast.org). This is an excellent service that can diagnose your online accessibility to the impaired. You can test a few pages for free; the program to check your entire Web site and the site license, which entitles you to display the Bobby icon, runs into thousands of dollars. A number of free and commercial services and software products to make your Web site accessible can be

found on the Web. One of these, another excellent service called A-Prompt, was developed by the University of Toronto and can be downloaded at no charge from <http://aprompt.snow.utoronto.ca/>. Whatever method you choose, *your campaign Web site's essential online materials should be accessible to the disabled.*

The 1990 Census reported that 13 percent of American citizens spoke a language other than English in their homes. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 stipulates non-English translations of all official election information if, generally speaking, more than 5 percent of a jurisdiction's voting age citizens do not speak English as their first language and possess limited English proficiency. *Your campaign Web site's essential online materials should adhere to the federal standards for ballot translation.* "Essential" is a discretionary call, of course. We recommend, at a minimum, translated versions of the home page, a dedicated statement by the candidate to those more comfortable with the non-English language, and contact information (to someone who speaks the language). >>>

- Someone to supervise the technical aspects of three processes: the posting of online content, the management of e-mail lists and correspondence, and system security, which entails accounts and passwords assigned to campaign staffers and responses to disruptions.

We consider the following to be hallmarks of a sophisticated online campaign, one that finds it strategically prudent to impress regular Net users with features they customarily find in commercial operations:

The Standard Operation

- A company to host audio and video files. (Basic for statewide and federal campaigns.)
- "Mail Your Friends" forms. (Also basic for statewide and federal campaigns.)
- Streaming audio and video files (for distribution of long and/or live events).
- Interactive features, such as games, quizzes, maps, and informal polls.
- Password-protected areas for restricted access.
- Usability testing to assess design quality.
- A search function to access Web site data by keywords.

Finally, there are relatively expensive capabilities emblematic of state-of-the-art Internet operations:

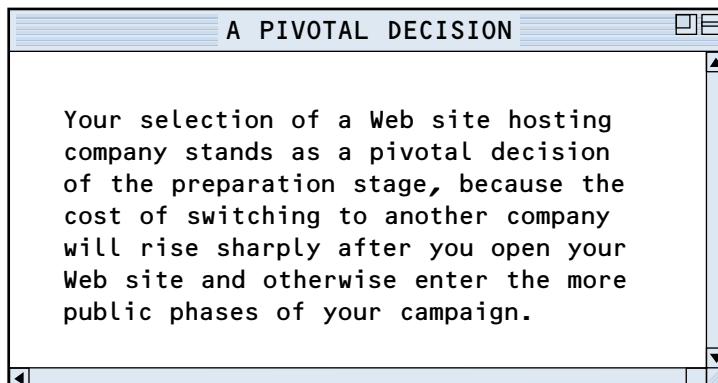
The Deluxe Operation

- Live interactive "town hall" services.
- "Content management solutions" to automate and expedite the posting of messages from many computers.
- An online store vending campaign merchandise. (Downloadable logos suitable for homemade signs should be free and, arguably, standard.)

Of all the items and services listed above, your selection of a Web site hosting company stands as a pivotal decision of the preparation stage, because the cost of switching to another company will rise sharply after you open your Web site and otherwise enter the more public phases of your campaign. Check computer magazine ads to get a sense of the range of options, and ask local businesses for references. A local Web-hosting service is important; the closer to your headquarters and district that your company is, the faster it will be for users in your area to access your site, and the easier it will be for you to work with the company when questions and problems arise. (Trust us, they will arise.)

Access and security are more important than locality, however. Your Web-hosting company should provide 24/7/365 telephone access to well-trained technicians. You should ask a company for the name of the last security fix, or "patch," they installed on their system, and then have your technical staff check it against the CERT Web site at www.cert.org to see if the company is keeping current with security technology. (CERT was once an acronym for Computer Emergency Response Team; it is now a center at Carnegie Mellon University.) Ask, also, to see a sample "log file" report on your site's traffic. You should negotiate a certain service level and know what it will cost (in time and labor as well as dollars) to move to different levels.

Oh, yes, don't buy or contract for anything without a test run. If it isn't easy to use and patently worthwhile, you don't want to learn how to make it so during the campaign. An excellent section on selecting high-tech products may be found in the book "Winning Campaigns Online," by online political veterans Emillienne Ireland and Phil Tajitsu Nash.



< Best Practice B >

DOCUMENT YOUR POSITIONS.

Research conducted by the Democracy Online Project, the Markle Foundation, and the Annenberg School at the University of Pennsylvania show abundant evidence that the online public wants documentation from political candidates, and that documentation generates big increases in credibility. (We practice what we preach. See the evidence summarized at our Web site, www.ipdi.org, with links to the documents.) Even as commercialization expands, the Internet is retaining its historical function as a way for individuals to conduct research. While news, advocacy, discussion, and action are important aspects of online political communication, what members of the online public say they want most of all from the Internet is to answer the questions on their minds. At a minimum, therefore, *you should substantiate your major issue positions on your campaign Web site, either directly or via links.*

The people have two good reasons to hold this expectation of documentation and to reward those who fulfill it. The first reason is civics; in a democracy, candidates are accountable to the people, and voters can choose rationally when the candidates have explained and justified their policy stances during the campaign. The second reason is economics; people know that the Internet allows a campaign to give them substantiating evidence at little cost. The marginal cost for that extra line and link is, technologically speaking, zero.

This minuscule cost is especially true where substantiation entails referring to information published online by others; all you need to do is provide a link to the original, and validating, source of your assertion. For example, whereas a broadcast ad can only flash a newspaper headline, a Web site can take readers directly to the news story. (You may have to pay a fee if the publisher charges for access to archived materials; links to public records, of course, are free.)

As for your own documents, we generally recommend not scanning them into your Web site. That looks tacky and can be difficult to read. Instead, have a volunteer type them into your computer according to principles of good Web design (see section 8). Better yet, have your communications team review your material and re-organize it with an ordinary reader's questions and vocabulary in mind. Most people don't want to scroll through six years

of news releases and co-sponsored legislation; they want to know what you have done about taxes or Medicare. Executives are not the only constituents who appreciate summaries at the beginning of a document. The time and effort your campaign invests in revising materials for the Net will pay off in sounder and sharper messages, which can be used offline, too.

An exception to the nonscanning rule arises when you must defend yourself against a charge, and original documents contain the exculpatory evidence. In his 2000 run for the presidency, John McCain was accused of writing a letter to a regulatory agency on behalf of a contributor. The accusation, if true, would have undermined McCain's position as an opponent of special-interest politics. As a response, the McCain campaign argued that the senator routinely wrote letters on behalf of many constituents. The campaign posted more than 100 letters as proof. The scandalous charge evaporated.

You may resist putting specific issue statements online, because your position has changed or because you want room to modify it later in the campaign. Such protective instincts are legitimate. But we think you can trust people while they are online to believe your assertion that a modified position is not a "flip-flop" or contradiction – so long as you let them see that for themselves. The way to do that is simple; date (or time-stamp) your statements, and explain any changes of position. You can thereby demonstrate that you changed for a reason, a move voters will respect. Camcorders automatically time-stamp videos; your researchers and Web content team should mimic this as a standard practice.

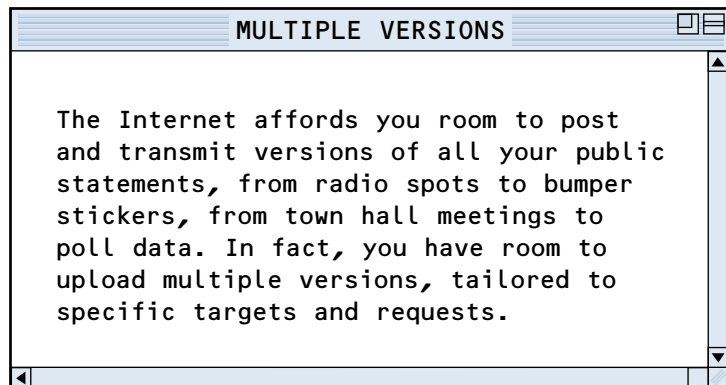
Documentation builds reciprocal trust. Your online visitors will be more likely to entrust you with a position of official power when you entrust them with the wherewithal to learn, in plain language and in full, about your stands on the issues. We know of at least one instance where a Democratic candidate won a close race for a seat in the Virginia state legislature and gave partial credit to the documentation she provided to inquiring voters, both through her Web site and through e-mail correspondence. (Yes, we document this, too, at www.ipdi.org.) >>>

WHAT SHOULD I PUT ONLINE...AND WHO SHOULD PUT IT THERE?

The Internet vastly expands your communications options. It can duplicate, replicate, and simulate your communications in all the other media you are accustomed to, from face-to-face meetings to broadcast advertisements, from billboards to books. It affords you room to post and transmit versions of all your public statements, from radio spots to bumper stickers, from town hall meetings to poll data. In fact, you have room to upload multiple versions, tailored to specific targets and requests.

This ocean of opportunity presents risks, some obvious, some submerged. As you move your materials online, remember that this is a very public medium. On the Net, you can disseminate one version of a message for your base and another for your swing voters, but you cannot preclude the possibility that the two versions might be juxtaposed in a harsh light by someone else. Nor can you exercise much control over what others say about you. A cautionary tale on this point comes from a congressional race where a pro-life Republican was running in a special election in a moderate district. Although the candidate was pro-life, he did not want abortion to become a major issue. But he left his Web site to a volunteer who was intensely pro-life. A week before the election, the candidate's online stand on abortion made front-page news. Or, to be precise, the discrepancy between his online and offline abortion positions made the news. He won, but his victory margin was narrower than it should have been.

Ahead, we offer advice on *how* to communicate online. The ancillary question is who should decide what goes online for your campaign. During the preparatory phase, you need to set up a process for reviewing, revising, releasing, and reflecting on what will become known as your online "content." This process is known as content management. As indicated in section 3, you can pay for a semi-automated content management "solution" and for strategic counsel on how to configure it and integrate it with your existing system of communication (however organized that may be). Ultimately, however, the candidate bears responsibility for this process, regardless of the level of office sought or the size of the campaign budget. Although much can be delegated, the candidate must, at the least, walk through the Web site and e-mail templates that will circulate



in his or her name. It wouldn't hurt to have the candidate see what comes back when his or her name is entered into a search engine, too.

In the 1990s, candidates leery of the Internet ocean could get away with staying on land. Today, candidates who avoid or minimize what they post online in effect cede control of their Net image to others. Setting up an explicit content management process is, increasingly, the only prudent option for a campaign. And there is a way to protect yourself against the vagaries of what is said in your name: document and time-stamp your positions.

WHAT SHOULD I BUDGET FOR MY NET OPERATION?

We agree with Ireland and Nash, who advise a campaign to allot 5 percent of its budget to the Internet, with half of that figure earmarked for developing the form, contents, network, and security of the operation and half earmarked for maintenance. Again, an Internet message, list, or database is a dynamic entity, requiring continuous attention.

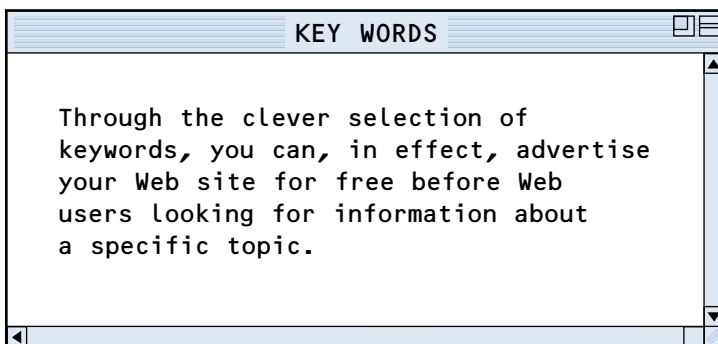
That percentage may strike you as risky. Few campaigns to date have spent as much as 1 percent on online activities. In considering a larger outlay, bear in mind the transportation and communication savings you will accrue. (If you have budget data from a previous campaign, compare transportation and offline media costs a month into your Net-utilizing campaign.) Consider, for example, the economic value of online volunteers. They can perform the digital equivalents of stuffing envelopes, packing public forums, and recruiting friends more often than before the Internet made such activities possible from home and work, and they can do so without having to be driven to a rented room and fed.

HOW WILL PEOPLE FIND ME ONLINE?

First, you will need a URL for your campaign Web site. Your Uniform Resource Locator (URL) is the Internet version of a phone number or building address. But there is much more for you to do regarding your URL than with those other locating codes. It is also up to you to: (2) register your URL with the Internet authorities, (3) select keywords to index your site by topic and locality, as well as by its name, (4) inform the major online directories about your URL and keywords, (5) place your URL on every piece of promotional literature you produce, and (6) refer to your Web site at every opportunity. The better you perform these tasks, the more likely it is that people will see your campaign message online.

Short, direct, and easy-to-spell URLs work best. For many campaigns, that will be your first and last names run together, e.g. *www.abelincoln.com*. Some campaigns add the year of the race or the office being sought. That delivers a campaign message, but you lose the chance to recycle the name for another election or another project that might trade off your name.

Once you have decided on a name, you must check to see whether anyone else has beaten you to it. Go to *www.register.com* to see what is available for the nominal fee. To minimize public confusion, it's a good idea to register the name you want in both the dot-com and dot-org forms; if only one is available, consider another name. Dot-com domain names are



the easiest for people to find. You will want to buy URLs that misspell your name, that use your initials, etc., and arrange to "point" visitors who enter those addresses to your site. You may also want to purchase domain names that can be used to unveil attack sites, as discussed in section 17. You may consider buying up domain names that combine your name with an insult or obscenity, to prevent opponents and detractors from using them. That might work. But buying up names can get rather involved, and any visible effort you make in this regard risks calling attention to those who would undermine you. (See Best Practice E.)

A family of URLs will help people who want to find your Web site. Additionally, through the clever selection of keywords, you can, in effect, advertise your Web site for free before Web users looking for information about a specific topic. That's because large sections of the Web are cross-indexed. Your candidate's full name, your campaign's top issue subjects, and important locations in your district all make good keywords. The more keywords you designate for indexing, the more doors you build to your site. (Your Web manager should know how to do the encoding so that major indices pick up your keywords.)

Next comes the registration campaign. A majority of the online public relies on a shrinking and shifting collection of Web portals and search engines (automated directories) to find Web sites: Yahoo, Microsoft Network, America Online, Google, etc. Good information about this collection may be found at *www.searchenginewatch.com*. Contact these Web giants directly, as soon as possible. Tell them your URL, the keywords you want to be indexed by, and provide a sentence of description (more free media!). Some search engines will charge a fee to list you at the top. Others do not take money for listings and will not allow you to submit keywords. You should also register with the directory sites run by the major news media outlets in your district, specialty portals to political sites, your political party's Web sites, supportive interest groups, and other voluntary organizations, local colleges and universities, etc. Now you understand why we refer to seeding your URL on the Web as a "campaign" unto itself.

Make sure you put your URL on all your campaign literature and advertisements. This will steer more traffic to your Web site, and it will also indicate to Net users and nonusers alike that you are a candidate of substance. Why? Because, as explained in Best Practice B, most people today know the Internet is where you go to get detailed information about a subject. Your willingness to refer to your Web site through your URL – especially in ads criticizing your opponent – says to the public that you have the evidence, logic, vision, and determination to back up your issue positions. Perhaps one in a hundred people will actually check the Web site, but they tend to be opinion leaders (including members of the press).

Finally, everyone associated with the campaign, especially the candidate, should know the URL address of the Web site by heart and encourage people to visit the site at every opportunity. If you have run a good registration campaign, visitors will get to the site even if they don't remember the URL.

WHAT ABOUT ONLINE ADVERTISING?

Thus far, online advertising has lacked the power of advertising in old media, but it can enhance your publicity efforts. In the 2000 election cycle, candidates for national, state, and local office enjoyed some successes with “banners” and “pop-ups” on news media and portal pages. Ads may also be placed with e-mail newsletters, and certain online discussion groups accept sponsorship deals (co-branded content). Given the perilous state of the online advertising industry, it is likely to be a buyer's market in 2002 and beyond.

Vendors and brokers of online ads can target with greater precision than their counterparts working with broadcast, print, direct mail, and the telephone, often at a lower cost per thousand reached than in these other media. Advertising content may be tested quickly and efficiently on the Net, and ads that prove popular can then be reproduced in other media. For example, an ad from the Republican National Committee offering those who clicked through the chance to win a free PDA netted thousands of e-mail names to the party. Online advertisements can reinforce name identification (branding), show off clout to political insiders (brandishing), and, thanks to the “click-through” feature, recruit volunteers.

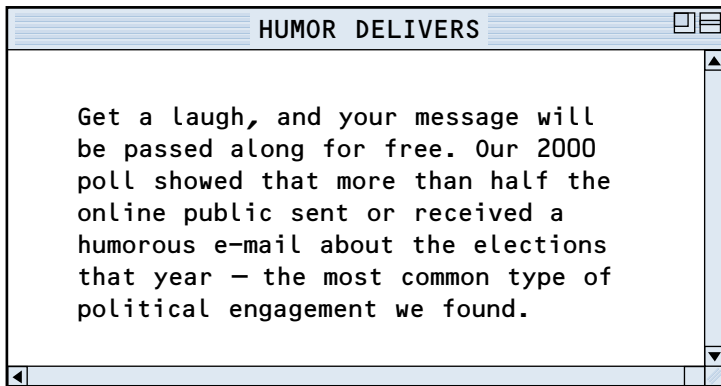
When contemplating an Internet advertising buy, you should bear in mind that many Internet users are disturbed by the surreptitious collection of information about them. You must check the privacy policies of the firms you do business with, to ensure that their standards comport with yours. (See Best Practice D.)

HOW CAN I MAKE MY E-MAILS AND WEB SITE APPEALING?

Answering this question could take up a primer of its own. Web design has become a cottage industry and a unit within many public relations firms. E-mail action alerts and recruiting messages have their own design requirements – writing a snappy and specific subject line, for instance. The form your online content inhabits ought to fulfill your strategic goals and play to your tactical strengths, so there is no formula to follow. Here, instead, are a few principles to keep in mind as you develop your online design:

Aesthetics

- **CONSISTENCY** – If the campaign colors are yellow and green, don't make your banner ad blue and purple. The online public should know at a glance that a message comes from your campaign. Deploy one family of fonts, one symbol, one slogan, one indexing scheme. And before you lock into a choice, check to see how well it shows up on computer monitors. If you subdivide field organizers by county, be sure to subdivide accomplishments, events, endorsements, and so forth by county, too.
- **DENSITY** – Strive for a balance of pictures, graphics, white space, and text on every Web page. Avoid “visual whiplash,” where a visitor clicks from one kind of page to another, e.g. text-heavy to graphics-heavy. Break up long texts with the “segment-and-scroll” system, an interactive table of contents whereby the top of a page lists and links to the text that follows. Remember: summary first, main message second, with details in descending order of importance.



- **NAVIGABILITY** – Web site visitors should always be able to get to the home page. The home page should have a link to a site index and offer live help from your campaign (contact information). A “navigation bar,” listing basic choices of direction for visitors across the top or down the side of the screen, is an essential feature; the choices should correspond to the basic purposes of the site. A good search function and cross-referencing links within texts will impress the media and political junkies, to the point where they may stay longer and get to know your campaign better.

Attitude

- **COURTESY** – Extend a welcome greeting. Encourage people to explore your Web premises, to ask for help, to suggest improvements. Validate sign-ups to volunteer or subscribe to an e-newsletter with instantaneous thank you messages. The more Net users feel like respected visitors, the more they will regard the candidate as suited for public service.
- **DIRECTNESS** – Be concise; online, people like to move at a smart pace. Spell out the acronyms and replace the jargon blighting those Inside-the-Beltway materials you deem worthy of uploading. And do not forget to include an explicit request and contact information along with the forms you supply for contributions and volunteering.
- **HUMOR** – Get a laugh, and your message will be passed along for free. Our 2000 poll showed that more than half the online public sent or received a humorous e-mail about the elections that year – the most common type of political engagement we found. Many people are online to do work or

research. Humor can provide them with a respite, and it doesn't have to meet the standards of entertainment media. So poke fun at yourself, lampoon your opponents, and have fun taking advantage of the Internet's capacity for multimedia parody.

Be sure to test your designs with a few outsiders. You can hire consultants to conduct “usability tests” that can identify problems people have in attempting to find what they are looking for and executing the tasks that you want them to perform. (This being a user-driven medium, you must give people something before asking them to help your campaign.) Low-budget campaigns can plop a few persons before a computer, tell them to find the contributions page on the Web site and fill out the form, and observe what happens.

For more design tips, see www.useit.com and www.circle.com.

Online and offline, effective speakers have long known that people are drawn to messages about other, interesting people. Good personality stories (alas, not the same as stories about good personalities) attract a crowd. In online campaigning, this communications axiom attests to the value of candidate diaries, complete with captioned photos of places visited, foods tasted, and, above all, hands shaken. Emphasizing people as content can also be a gateway to a useful demonstration of character and community.

EXHIBIT AND EXTEND YOUR COMMUNITY TIES.

The Internet provides an elegant device for candidates to show people that they care about the future of the community they aspire to represent and that they are committed to the democratic process of resolving community problems through public discussion and public choice. This device is the link (short for "hyperlink," an encoded section of text that Web users can click on to go from one site to another). We have already recommended linking to the facts your campaign compiles to document your claims. Here we advocate links to, and in certain circumstances, from, individuals, groups, organizations, and governments.

Your campaign should display and/or link to, your candidate's memberships, endorsements, and testimonials from nonaffiliated citizens. Membership lists and links can afford Net users a glimpse of the social side of a politician's life and make a winsome addition to a campaign biography. People like to learn about candidates' personal tastes and hobbies as well as their political interests. By testimonials, we mean statements of praise from individuals speaking in an unaffiliated capacity, as citizens. Testimonials will repay the campaign for the purchase of a digital camera. People like to see individuals like themselves – and, of course, themselves – photographed with a candidate. Give testimonial-givers a touch of renown, and they will tell their friends about your Web site.

Endorsements are naturals for reciprocal links; you send people elsewhere, and the other location sends them to you. Ideally, you construct a link so that the two digital pages being bridged are both about the topic forming the basis of a bond between the campaign and the community. For example, say you have won the endorsement of the state association of police chiefs. A smart link would go from your policy statement on crime to an endorsement statement by the police chiefs touting your role in reducing crime. The week of the endorsement, you would have additional links between your home and news pages and those on the police chiefs' site. Devoting a page on your Web site to all links to Endorsing Organizations and Individuals is another good move; the list will be a dynamic symbol of the campaign coalition. An omnibus section titled "Links," however, looks lazy.

Your campaign should display or link to voter information for your district. By voter information, we mean registration deadlines, rules, and forms; ballot facsimiles;

and interactive maps and databases to help people determine whether they reside in your district (especially important this year, after reapportionment) and, later, to help them locate their polling places. In supplying this information, you perform a civic as well as a self-interested service. However, when these links go to government or nonpartisan civic sites, they may be unable for legal and ethical reasons to provide a reciprocal link.

Do not set up a link without inspecting the entire site you are connecting to, and – assuming the site passes inspection – without informing the party to whom you are linking, where such a link implies an endorsement of your candidacy. (There is no need to obtain permission to link to a public information source.) Linking without permission is a semi-acceptable practice on the Net, but it's a poor move in the context of a political campaign. It can lead to an embarrassing incident where you are disavowed by the entity behind the site to which you have linked. Conversely, it can be a missed opportunity. Outsiders may be flattered by your request for a link and may be persuaded to add a statement of support on their sites. Finally, there will be instances where you make positive contact with representatives of an organization, only to discover that their site goes too far for your tastes and purposes. Due diligence will save you here. So will a general statement on your Web site that disavows responsibility for anything Net users may encounter when they follow a link out of your site.

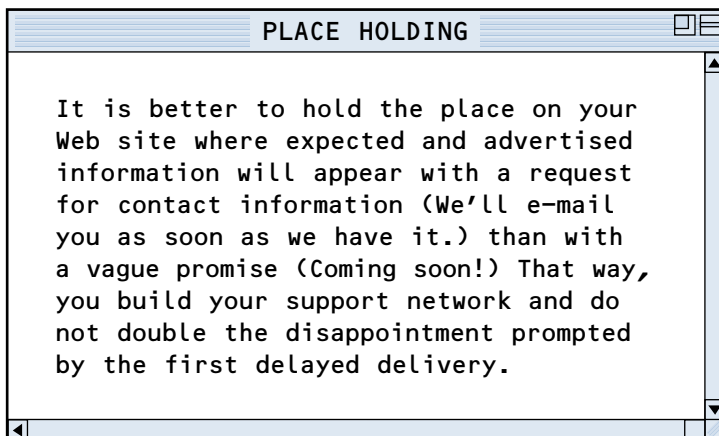
There are no prohibitions on linking out from your campaign Web site. There may be some limits on corporations, unions, and other institutions linking into your campaign Web site. In many states, the relevant regulatory agency has yet to rule on whether such links constitute an "in-kind" contribution; a clarification on this point for federal campaigns rests, at this writing, with the Federal Election Commission. (Check the Institute Web site for the latest details on this and other laws and regulations pertinent to online campaigning.)

Links are not always a good move. You may lose more people from your site than enter from the site with which you have established reciprocity. In the final analysis, though, community links, along with lists and photos, persuasively encourage the online public to conclude that this candidate is, indeed, a man or woman of the people. >>>

HOW OFTEN DO I NEED TO UPDATE INFORMATION?

It depends on the situation. In normal circumstances, Web site visitors expect to see that you are on the ball and will downgrade your campaign if they do not encounter any content dated within a week of their visit. That should not pose too stiff a challenge for most campaigns, which are accustomed to emphasizing a different issue a week as they plan news releases and community appearances. Whenever you release information through any medium, announce that fact online, and ideally post a version of the information within hours of the release. Then people will regard your Web site as the dynamic archive of a well-organized and crisply run campaign.

Your campaign schedule should be kept current on a daily basis for the final four to six weeks before the election. If you are concerned about your opponent sending people to your events to make trouble, then update daily by detailing where you were yesterday, and build attendance for events primarily through e-mail. During debates, crises, and the last four days before the election, the pace should quicken further, with multiple updates a day and perhaps real-time posting of information. Your Net operation can help you lead opinion at these malleable moments, through e-mail alerts in particular.



There will be times when you cannot post information fast enough to meet demand or your normal pace of release. It is better to hold the place on your Web site where expected and advertised information will appear with a request for contact information (We'll e-mail you as soon as we have it.) than with a vague promise (Coming soon!) That way, you build your support network and do not double the disappointment prompted by the first delayed delivery.

The best approach to ensuring that your Net operation is up to date is to assign that responsibility to one person on your campaign team. Such a Web manager should also have a say in site design and redesign decisions, and it often makes sense to give him or her a seat at the table where message release strategy is formulated. However, the Web site should not be so complex that a campaign volunteer cannot update the site. A good Web manager or software package should provide easy-to-follow instructions for other campaign communications personnel to make content-related changes.

HOW DO I ASSEMBLE AND MAINTAIN MY E-MAIL LISTS?

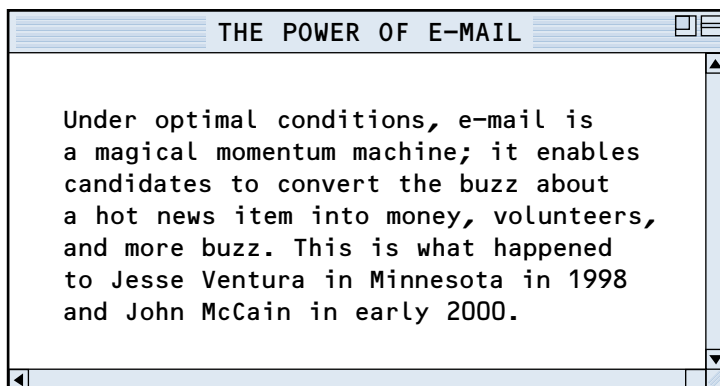
E-mail will matter more to your campaign than your Web site. Indeed, the main purpose of your Web site should be to build e-mail lists of volunteers, contributors, reporters, and the interested public (which, you should always remember, will include your opposition). In terms of per-unit message cost and clarity, e-mail can get the communication tasks of a campaign done better than any other single medium. As our friends in the United Kingdom have noted (www.voxpolitics.com/primer.shtml), e-mail is easy to create, understand, and send. And, in sharp contrast to your Web site, e-mail enables you to take the communications initiative. There are limits to what you can do, discussed in the next section on spam. But when someone signs onto your e-mail list, that grants you permission to call him or her into action on a repeated basis. This alert function would be reason enough to devote lots of resources to e-mail. Yet some of the actions you call for *by* e-mail can be accomplished *through* e-mail, as well. From contributions to advance work to spreading the word, e-mail mobilization is, today, the "killer application" of the Internet for politics.

Under optimal conditions, e-mail is a magical momentum machine; it enables candidates to convert the buzz about a hot news item into money, volunteers, and more buzz. This is what happened to Jesse Ventura in Minnesota in 1998 and John McCain in early 2000. E-mail also powers campaigns under ordinary conditions. For example, thousands of conservatives have joined a Sixty Second Activist Club, which relies on e-mail to make good on its name.

As a candidate, you should be ready to collect e-mail addresses whenever you meet people. Your volunteers should be prompted to do likewise; it's a good idea to stage a contest for the most sign-ups to your campaign newsletter. You should construct your Web site so people can sign up swiftly for lists that your content encourages them to join. Each page should have a button or box that takes visitors to a sign-up form elsewhere on the site. Each interactive form should have the default option set so that people who send one message to your campaign, and thereby supply their e-mail addresses, agree to accept e-mail from you in the future. Make sure, however, that this option is prominent enough not to offend the many online users who are concerned about their privacy. You suggest that they join, and make it easy, but do not sign them up without their notice and consent. (See Best Practice D.)

One of the beauties of e-mail lists is that you can merge them at a few keystrokes. You can send exactly the messages you want, to precisely the lists you want, at the very moments you want. For instance, it's a snap to invite your list members in a particular ZIP code to an upcoming candidate appearance in their area and solicit help in building attendance. To be sure, you cannot guarantee that the messages will remain only with those recipients. But at least you can target them in the first place, and so long as you bear in mind that your opposition will be reading, the downsides of message spillover can be minimized.

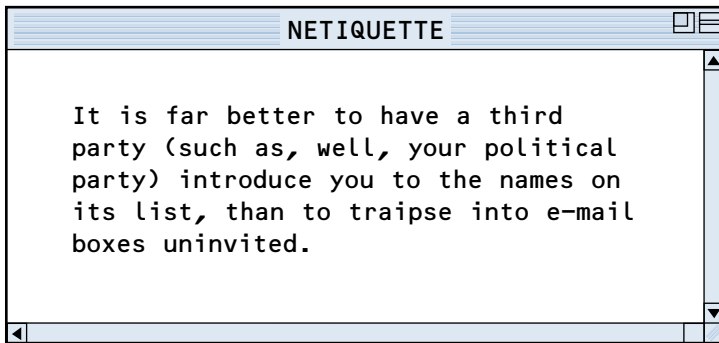
Purging lists is, alas, not as easy as merging them. There is no central directory to check e-mail addresses, and multiple addresses are common. Yet check you must, because your reputation requires it; if you are plaguing voters with unwanted e-mails, you are not helping your cause whatsoever. You can forestall this problem somewhat, in two ways. First, set up your e-mail sign-up form so that you ask for residential addresses along with the e-mail addresses. That will cut down on duplication and error. However, be careful not to ask for too much information in your



sign-up forms, or people will abandon them (as they are wont to desert online "shopping carts" that lead to pages of entry boxes before "check-out.") Second, you can let your list members help you purge your lists, by providing an "unsubscribe" option at the bottom of every e-mail your campaign sends. The unsubscribe feature buys you good will and provides you with valuable, albeit imprecise, feedback that there may be a problem with the length, frequency, or contents of your messages.

Go at e-mail list-building full force, from day one of your campaign. Cross-promote your lists, and coordinate your missives with events and deadlines. The education list members who gave you \$100 each toward the procurement of air time for the television ad you sent them might pony up again to help you produce an ad that responds to an attack on your environmental voting record. Offer benefits to signatories (and if the benefit is being kept up to date with campaign happenings via an e-newsletter, offer a free sample issue). Be up front with people. Inform them at the moment they choose to subscribe *approximately* how often they will receive e-mails from your campaign.

Use a listserv to send out your e-mails. Relying on the "cc" and "bcc" functions of your e-mail program risks releasing the names on your list, which will embarrass you if it happens.



Encourage people to forward your messages to a few friends. Your best messages will accomplish this goal automatically, lifting your campaign by "word of mouse." Your message will reach people you haven't targeted in an environment conducive to your cause, in as much as Net users are more likely to read an e-mail from a friend than from a political organization. You can also simulate this process, and try your hand at "viral" campaigning. Prominently stating "please forward to a friend" is one method; there are software programs and services on the market to generate viral e-mail from your Web pages. Any viral campaigning you foster should square with your privacy policy, as discussed in Best Practice D.

So far, we have talked about e-mail flowing in one direction, from the campaign outward. But it will flow back to you, too – and some of it will be unprompted and demanding. We talk about digesting the contents of the e-mail you get, when and how to answer it, and how and why to analyze it, ahead in Section 18. The salient point here is that managing e-mail lists, and the relationships they embody, is as time-consuming and crucial to the success of an online campaign as managing content.

WHAT IS SPAMMING, AND HOW DO I AVOID IT?

Unwanted e-mail has become known as "spam." (The derogatory term comes from a comedy sketch by the British troupe Monty Python.) Much of the e-mail you send to people who have not agreed to receive it can be construed as spam. So you must strike a balance between, on the one hand, the few who will open e-mail from an unknown source and respond favorably and, on the other hand, the few who will not only reject such e-mail but retaliate against you. Persons angered by spam can wreak technological mischief and bring down a pile of unfavorable publicity on your campaign. They can alert Internet service providers (ISP), who have and will again cut off campaigns from reaching their subscribers. In at least one instance, an ISP has terminated service to a campaign itself.

It is far better to have a third party (such as, well, your political party) introduce you to the names on its list, than to traipse into e-mail boxes uninvited. That said, we do not favor the abolition of political spam. Political speech merits constitutional protection, and democracy demands that citizens occasionally hear about public concerns even though they have not sought out the information in advance. However, there are a few steps you can take to protect your right to declaim from the digital soapbox without overly offending the online public:

- *Don't e-mail anonymously or otherwise disguise your identity.* Fair is fair. Political relationships among free people begin with reciprocal trust...and you're going first. As with direct mail envelopes, you can use teasers in subject lines, but stand behind your messages.
- *If you use a public list to contact strangers, say so.* You never want to set off Net users' worries about the privacy of their personal data, and if you say nothing on this score, chances are that you will.
- *Allow people to remove their address from your list, and act promptly on such requests.* If they say go away and don't come back, that's their privilege.

WHAT CAN I DO WITH THE DATA I COLLECT?

E-mail lists constitute one form of data that can run afoul of people's sense of privacy. There are other forms, some quite useful to your campaign, which are perfectly acceptable so long as you play within the foul lines. You can learn which ads work best, in which venues, for a variety of audiences and situations. You can increase traffic to your Web site and improve its flow so that, first, more site visitors follow the persuasive sequences you devise and, second, you can handle surges. You can track the treatment different media outlets accord your news releases.

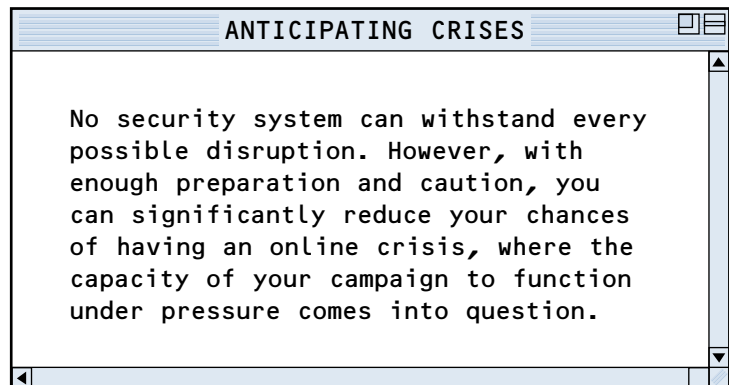
In each case, computerized analysis of the data you have obtained permits more precise allocation of resources during the next cycle of performance. Results can be quite dramatic in real-time cycles, as are typical on Election Day in close races. For example, in the 2000 Missouri Senate election between Mel Carnahan and John Ashcroft, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was able to use the Internet and sophisticated software to readjust the telephone calling schedules of its Get Out The Vote coordinators every 30 minutes, based on early returns in key precincts. Because of a court-ordered late-night re-opening of polling stations in St. Louis, the cyber-network and its quick adjustments contributed to Carnahan's slim victory.

You can incorporate data collection, analysis, and semi-automated adjustments (also known as "optimization") into your Net operation through several methods. Hundreds of software programs, some available at no cost, can track visitor paths through your Web site. Online questionnaires and surveys construct electronic bins into which standardized responses may accumulate, ready for tabulation. Be sure to recognize that the results of polls posted on your Web site and in your e-mail will be nonscientific – and be sure to label any results you share with the public as such. Be aware, too, that if you do not allow for open-ended answers, the public opinions you have collected are only as reliable and range only as far as the questions you constructed.

Consultants and other Net experts should be given the chance to install feedback systems for your campaign. But you need to make sure they don't go overboard and collect the wrong kinds of information. Computer users everywhere fear that information they send to a content provider will be used for purposes to which they never imagined or consented. In some cases, their fears are unwarranted. Most feedback data can and should be processed in the aggregate, without individual identities being disclosed. Still, you should reassure people, and develop, post, and live by a privacy policy.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT TECHNICAL DISRUPTIONS TO MY NET OPERATION?

The last component of your Net operation that needs to be in place by the launch day of your Web site revolves around security. The cold fact is that you are vulnerable to traffic congestion, equipment malfunction, acts of digital vandalism (e.g. defacing your home page or defacing your opponent's page and making it look like your campaign did it), and such serious cyber-crimes as data theft and destruction. Building in redundancies and hiring outsiders to perform security checks can be expensive, especially if you resort to these moves in the wake of a disruption, when time is at a premium. Better to have an online communications crisis plan to deal with these contingencies.



Your online crisis plan should designate a response team whose members are on call in sufficient numbers throughout the campaign to handle most situations. They should know how to execute in the event of a technical disturbance. They should have the phone numbers of your ISP and security service and contact names at both companies, prepared statements for immediate multimedia distribution, and access to backed-up data. (You do back up your data, don't you? Your Web manager or a comparable staff member should ensure that your Web site is backed up on a regular basis onto a computer at the campaign headquarters.) One member of your crisis team should collaborate with the chief of staff to develop controls over the distribution of passwords, so that, in the event that anyone departs the campaign in a foul mood, said person cannot exact revenge via the Net operation. For a checklist of detailed security questions, see the online brochure prepared by the Business Software Alliance, at www.bsa.org/security/resources/checklist.pdf.

No security system can withstand every possible disruption. However, with enough preparation and caution, you can significantly reduce your chances of having an online crisis, where the capacity of your campaign to function under pressure comes into question. Instead, with a good plan and team at the ready, you increase the likelihood that your campaign handles an online disruption smoothly. Then your reputation will be enhanced as someone who can cope with the technical glitches that life in the Internet age hurls at all of us.

< Best Practice D >

DEVELOP, POST, AND LIVE BY A PRIVACY POLICY.

Basic decency requires respect for the privacy of people who, by coming into contact with your online campaign, risk exploitation of data that has been, and could be, compiled about them. The advent of the digital age has intensified popular awareness about privacy. Americans know how easy it is for all sorts of people to "mine" online databases compiled by other organizations. You don't want privacy to become an issue at your expense. But drawing a fair line between legitimate and illegitimate data collection, data sharing, and online interactivity is a delicate undertaking. There are different kinds of personal information, different methods and routes of acquisition, and different relationships between a campaign and those who contact it via the Internet. So you need a privacy policy, an explicit set of guidelines, in plain English, by which your campaign will proceed.

As you construct your privacy policy, three principles should stand out: notify users, give them options, and be first to respond to any problems.

You should post a statement about your privacy policy on your campaign Web site. Seems like a no-brainer, yet far too many congressional campaigns violated the notification principle in 2000, as scholar Chris Hunter has documented (see our Web site for a link to his paper). Better yet, you should supply a brief explanation about data collection, and option boxes to procure consent, at each threshold point of your Net operation. We have already discussed one such point: *your e-mails should include an "unsubscribe" option.* You become a spammer with the very next e-mail you send to someone who received an e-mail from you without that option, regardless of whether the person subscribed in the first place or received it unsolicited.

You build another privacy threshold that you should make visible to and voluntary for users whenever you, or one of your vendors, deploys a "cookie" to track Web movements in and around your site. In most cases, cookie data remains anonymous; you receive aggregate data about batches, as it were. In many cases, Net users agree to cookies, because cookies streamline the actions they want to take. But convenience and nonidentification do not abrogate the principles of notice, consent, and accountability. When you arrange to trace a person's movements without his or her knowledge, you are spying.

Some Net operations presume from users' actions that they have consulted the privacy policy statement (such as it is, wherever it has been placed) and tacitly assented to it, in as much as they did not "opt-out" of the arrangement (such as was allowed, by removing a check from an option box, for instance). As the parentheses and clauses of the preceding sentence suggest, this opt-out approach places a labyrinthine burden of privacy protection on potential victims. Although opt-in menus can be an improvement, they are not if the options offered do not specify the entire range of data uses. *You should ask individuals to consent to each category by which your campaign will collect, use, and release data about them.* Of course, there is one category where neither you nor they have a choice: the law requires many campaigns to collect and report certain information from certain donors. We deal with this mandated exception to the consent principle in Best Practice E.

In general, the less people associate with your campaign, the larger the zone of privacy you need to extend to them. To illustrate, moving outward:

- Privacy and campaign staff/volunteers – Your staff and volunteers should understand from the outset that their campaign activities may, as the familiar telephone phrase goes, be monitored for purposes of quality assurance. Again, this can be a delicate line to draw, as when you encourage volunteers to contact friends by e-mail. But draw a line for all to see. That affords protection to them and to your campaign principals in the event of controversial activities. It keeps a record that may be made public, whether to brag or to defend. A record of online campaign actions also helps a politician sustain political competence across election cycles.
- Privacy and subscribers to campaign newsletters – These individuals should understand that they will be contacted now and then (with increasing frequency as election day nears), but that the campaign will not share anything it knows about them with anyone else unless they so approve.
- Privacy and Web site visitors – These individuals should understand that they will not be contacted by e-mail unless they subscribe to your newsletter, volunteer, or donate and that their movements will only be monitored inside your site and in the aggregate.
- Privacy and children – This is a particularly sensitive issue. President Clinton, prior to the end of his second term, signed a privacy law applicable to commercial and general audience Web sites, the Children's Online

Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), that prohibits asking children for their names, address, and other identifiable information without their parents' consent. COPPA, however, does not apply to the Web sites of most non-profit entities, including campaign committees.

Third parties are where it really gets complicated. There are third parties from whom you collect data, as when a volunteer sends an e-postcard to a friend via a form you supply, and you thereby obtain information about the friend. And there are third parties with whom you share and exchange data: political, commercial, nonprofit, and (voluntary) government organizations. There is no calculating all the permutations and transfers. But, on the intake side, *your privacy policy should explicitly cover individuals contacted on your behalf.* Meanwhile, on the outgo side, *your privacy policy should establish a line of responsibility for data you possess about individuals, a line that extends beyond the life of your campaign.*

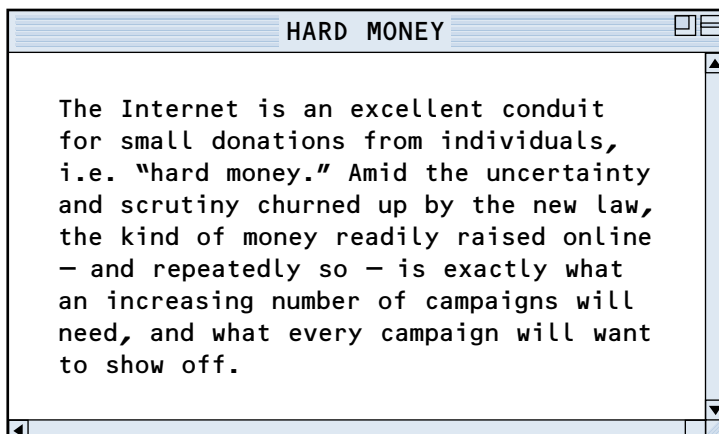
This means you should take responsibility for what volunteers, vendors, and partners do in the service of your campaign. There may be discrepancies between your policy and theirs; learn about them, make them explicit, and incorporate a sensible division of accountability into your policy. Be aware that, even if you do not release data to any outsiders, the information your campaign collected will not disintegrate on Election Day. You need to tell people up front how you plan to retain or dispose of it.

The permanent security of data is one of several aspects of the privacy problem best solved by establishing a campaign privacy officer. This person can take the lead in answering questions, resolving disputes, and modifying the policy. *Provide contact information for privacy matters.* Your campaign will benefit immeasurably when people from vendors to users to their lawyers know that problems can best be ironed out if they come to you first. >>>

HOW DO I SOLICIT AND COLLECT MONEY ONLINE?

Raising money for your campaign through the Internet offers several unique advantages. First, once you have installed a system to solicit and process donations, the cost per “acquisition” (that is, a successful solicitation) plummets toward the marginal cost of sending out an online message, which is, of course, zero. Second, online funds can be reported and banked in a heartbeat, meaning that donations can be turned around for expenditure in a very short amount of time. Third, Internet users can initiate donations with unparalleled ease. The online finance department – and, for that matter, the online campaign store – never close and are keystrokes away from everyone. Smart campaigners can thereby capitalize, literally, on news that seems to make the case for them, by having in place a transactional system for contributions when events incline people to lend their impulsive support.

How do you build such a system into your Net operation? We recommend outsourcing the technical aspects. You will need expert help either to install or to contract for a “secure server,” which encodes communication in both directions, so as to guard against unauthorized access to credit card information. Relying on an outside vendor reduces security and maintenance costs, because the vendor can distribute them among clients. As you look for vendors, ascertain what national, state, and local laws permit and under what conditions. (Need assistance? Check our Web site.) At the federal level, for example, donations taken over the Internet via credit card forms are



legal so long as you collect the other information required of each donor.

It's not enough to put up a Web page where donors can input their credit card information. You need to ask for the money. Another no-brainer, yet only 3 percent of candidates for the House of Representatives in 2000 asked for money online. Incredibly, only 20 percent of those who made it possible to give online “made the ask.” Given the relatively impersonal and highly public nature of online communication, appeals tied to your issue positions appear to work better than the sorts of pitches common to face-to-face, telephone, and direct mail fundraising.

Although electronic donations work best, your online ask should offer a form that can be mailed in and a phone number, too. You should be willing and able to take donations in whatever medium the voters are willing to give them. We say more about this in Best Practice G.

As with the other aspects of online campaigning, your online fund raising should dovetail with what you are doing offline. The campaign store should stock items viewed on television and at rallies. Fundraising events can be coordinated with online fund raising to great effect. E-mails can be sent inviting supporters to a breakfast, to be followed by e-mails with directions, reminders, and thank-you messages; the contribution form or link to same should appear on each message. Attendees who “forgot their checkbook” can be asked for their e-mail address and subsequently reminded of their commitment, not to mention prompted later for another donation.

Online fund raising is becoming a standard practice in campaigning. It is simple for the campaign to implement and the user to execute. The new federal campaign finance reform law adds this incentive: the Internet is an excellent conduit for small donations from individuals, i.e. “hard money.” Amid the uncertainty and scrutiny churned up by the new law, the kind of money readily raised online – and repeatedly so – is exactly what an increasing number of campaigns will need, and what every campaign will want to show off.

HOW DO I DEAL WITH THE PRESS ONLINE?

The 2000 election cycle was ballyhooed, in part, as “the year of the Net,” and as a result campaigns could garner free media by being the first to do something online and letting the press know about it. That story has run out of gas. But the press, like the rest of the world, relies on the Internet more and more to do its job.

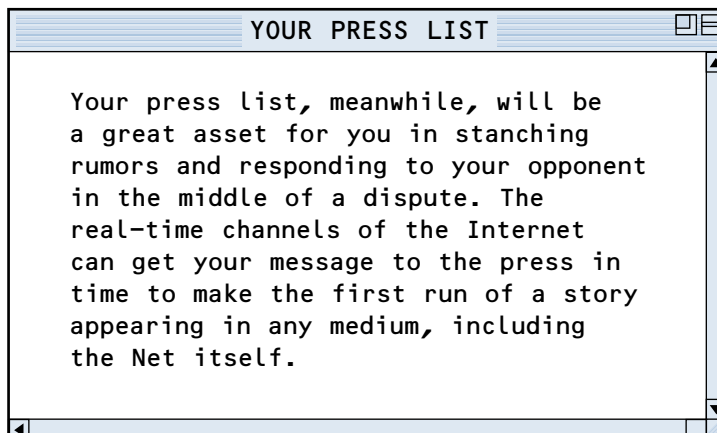
Political reporters will appreciate being sent your press releases by e-mail or, in some cases, via text messaging. Your press list, meanwhile, will be a great asset for you in stanching rumors and responding to your opponent in the middle of a dispute. The real-time channels of the Internet can get your message to the press in time to make the first run of a story appearing in any medium, including the Net itself. Not even blast faxes can do that as well. You might consider setting up a password-protected section of your Web site exclusively for the press. The Gore 2000 campaign used such a digital credentialing system to help track stories about it.

It is important not to let charges and rumors go unanswered, but it is also important not to succumb to the impulse to fire off a message to the press every time a new variation pops up. During the last election cycle, two campaigns got into an e-mail battle with the result that one journalist received over 150 messages in a 24-hour period. The story he wound up writing was about the schoolyard behavior, not about the issue. Sometimes, credibility depends on knowing when to sit down and shut up.

At least once during the campaign, reporters will give your Web site the once-over. Be aware that some will be political reporters, while others will be technology reporters, and they will review your site according to their specialty. However, their inspection does not guarantee that they will review your site in public. The day has not yet arrived when a new or revamped campaign Web site is considered news.

In seeking everyday news about your campaign, journalists will stick with traditional methods: telephone interviews, showing up at news conferences, and watching your television ads. They will use the Net to confirm facts and to fill out investigative stories, but they will range well beyond your site in doing so.

One site in particular, www.opensecrets.org, has emerged as a favorite Web stop for political reporters. Be familiar with how it packages the campaign



finance data you report to the government. Keep tabs, as well, on Web sites that are the digital analog to the pub nearby City Hall or the State Capitol: www.gothamgazette.com and www.politicsnj.com, and so on. The pub site in your jurisdiction will help you keep tabs, in turn, on amateur online news and gossip hounds covering your campaign. Some of the minds behind these idiosyncratic e-newsletters (sometimes called “blogs,” short for “weblogs”) will check what URLs you register, what keywords you use in your registration campaigns, and what links are established between your site and the rest of the world. One discovered in 1999 that the Quayle for President Web site was indexed by “potatoe.”

Remember that, thanks to the thick weave of the Internet, there really is no such thing as a small circulation outlet from your standpoint. Anyone with a brain and a lead can ignite a news story about your campaign. It might not spark much interest at first. But since the better major media outlets are, increasingly, creating special campaign archives on their Web sites, culminating in comprehensive voter guides, a one-day story may roar to life at any time.

When bad news breaks on you, nothing will fan it more in the eyes of the press than evasive behavior. Disclosure will douse the flames, especially if you have established a prior pattern of disclosure and made transparency a core value of your Net operation.

< Best Practice E >

EXPLAIN THE RULES, AND SHOW YOU COMPLY.

You can occupy the high ground early in your campaign with a substantive gesture of transparency: *Your campaign should make all legally required disclosures available and understandable through your campaign Web site.* We have three categories in mind: 1) Campaign finance data, both contributions and expenditures. 2) Personal financial statements. 3) The appropriate “paid for and authorized by” disclaimer, as required by the federal, state, or local law governing your campaign. *The disclaimer should appear on your e-mails as well as your Web site.* There may be other required disclosures, which your lawyer should tell you about; our Web site will provide you with a general start on this topic.

If you don't like a disclosure law, in whole or in part, and would, in office, work to change it, this is how and where to make that issue position clear. If you have a wide base of support, your campaign contribution data help demonstrate it. If you don't want to devote resources to posting all the data you have filed, simply link to a government or nonpartisan Web site that does. All this will boost your credibility with the press and swing voters in the event of a dispute over information later in the campaign.

You may well resist exposing your ledgers to the online world. However, government and civic Web sites are exposing what you must file anyway, so you might as well claim justifiable credit for being open about it, and frame the data in a favorable context. Bear in mind that federal law and the laws of some states prohibit other candidates and commercial firms from soliciting your donors from your list. Federal campaigns can seed their donor lists with fake names to catch list poachers, so long as they inform the FEC in advance.

Your campaign will benefit from disclosure in another way; it will help dissipate the confusion besetting online communication in this early stage of its existence. Unlike dialing a wrong phone number or driving to a wrong street address, it is not always immediately apparent that a person has reached a wrong Web site. There have been numerous instances of “rogue” Web sites established by pranksters, speculators (cyber-squatters), and opponents to particular candidates. These sites masquerade as official campaign sites, often duplicating their iconography and prose, in attempts to mislead visitors. Citizens are especially susceptible to being fooled with respect to down-ballot offices, where the correctives of news coverage and large publicity budgets are absent or scarce.

What recourse do you have? We oppose the banning and regulating of mock Web sites, so long as the sites clearly and correctly disclose their sponsorship on a readily accessible home page. We think campaigns can survive criticism that takes the form of parody, whereas democracy cannot survive restrictions on content that would require someone in government to decide when or what kind of a parody has gone too far. In contrast, we favor the criminalization of e-mail sent to citizens that falsely represents its source. That would be consistent with the law as it applies to offline campaign communications. (In August 1999, a Mississippi congressional candidate pleaded guilty to mailing unsigned brochures derogating two of his primary opponents and postcards falsely claiming to be from the American Civil Liberties Union. This was the first successful prosecution under the misrepresentation section of the Federal Elections Campaign Act.)

Democracy treasures accountability, especially from those who would hold public office. Your best recourse as an online campaigner is to disclose the origin of all of your own materials, explain what the law requires you to disclose, and refrain from giving free publicity to unfriendly imitators by complaining about them in public. >>>

WHEN SHOULD I PARTICIPATE IN ONLINE FORUMS?

To deal with journalists, you need to know the rules of engagement and the patterns of the stories they like to tell. You sacrifice a modicum of your control over format and message in order to add credibility to your message and gain distribution among swing groups. The same considerations apply to nonjournalistic media opportunities such as talk shows, questionnaires, and debates. Versions of each of these

campaign forums have emerged on the Internet in the last few years.

The online equivalent of the talk show is the chat room. Enter one at your own risk. *Chat room exchanges* tend to unfold with all the sophistication and coherence you would encounter if you walked into the lunchroom of a junior high school. Actually, you would be better off in the lunchroom; the clamor would die down long enough for students to see who you were, many would listen to your explana-

tion of what the dickens you were doing there, and your remarks would not be archived for posterity (unless you allowed a news crew to tag along).

On a somewhat higher plane, some news media Web sites schedule *moderated discussions*. These resemble an appearance at a bookstore or speaker series; the sponsor and host ensure that you will get a decent hearing. Indeed, your appearance will be available to the entire world, via webcast and, more commonly, instantaneous transcription. However, there are as yet no famous online moderators with popular programs to which Net users regularly flock. An online Oprah may be a few years in coming. There is little excitement to speak of watching lines of text scurry across a computer screen. Whereas it can be all too exciting for you to try and answer questions in a live moderated discussion. Even when you accept the sponsor's offer to have someone transcribe your answers, there's a subtle difference between speaking off the cuff and transcripts of off-the-cuff remarks. The body language available to you and your audience in the former enables you to cut off a response when it seems to be going bad and for audiences to cut you slack when your humanity shines between the lines. Don't head into a moderated discussion without several practice sessions.

Campaigns have enjoyed success staging moderated discussions when they have been clear about the purposes of such sessions. "Town Halls" meant to resemble the fabled democratic forum of self-governance will probably not do much good on the campaign trail. The press and public see through the pretension. In contrast, an exclusive online interactive session with the candidate and/or top-level campaign staff can be a splendid morale-booster for volunteers and reward for loyal contributors. These *virtual meetings* may generate a few useful ideas, to boot.

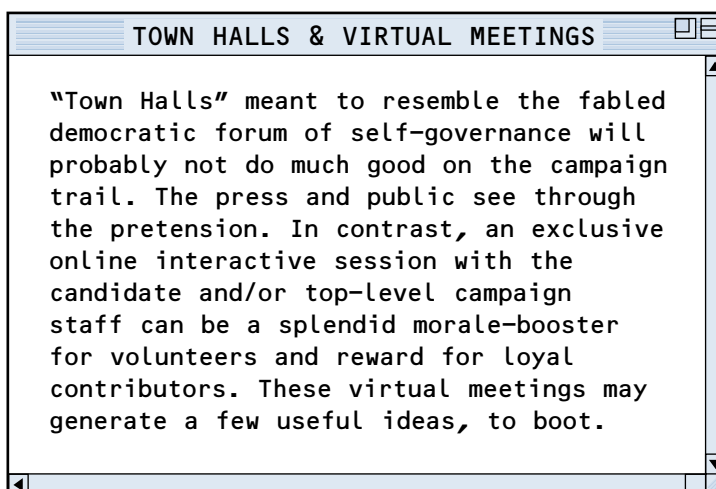
The news media, interest groups, and civic associations have gotten into the act of submitting *online questionnaires* to campaigns. Project Vote Smart, www.vote-smart.org, and the League of Women Voters' D-Net (D as in Democracy), www.Dnet.org, have taken the online questionnaire to elaborate and dynamic lengths. In a dynamic questionnaire format, campaigns have the chance to modify their responses, although it is much, much harder to subtract than to add remarks.

Campaigns understandably resist fitting their issue statements into someone else's box. Someone else has framed – and perhaps loaded – the questions and

set the deadlines and word limits. We recommend negotiating for (or simply inserting) two things in your answers to questionnaires. First, refer readers to your campaign Web site repeatedly in your answers, for the stated purpose of amplification and documentation. Second, refer readers to an upcoming event, ideally sponsored by the questionnaire-senders, where you will speak on the subjects brought up by the questions. At events, you can make a good personable impression even when you give answers the expected audience will not like.

Add opening and closing statements, and exchanges with other candidates, and an online questionnaire turns into something like a debate. Minnesota E-Democracy and Web, White, and Blue have pioneered the *online campaign debate*, and the format seems destined to become part of the political landscape eventually. But this could take a while. Recall that more than 20 years elapsed between the introduction of television into the American marketplace and the first televised presidential debate, and another 16 years went by before the second debate occurred.

We think a great innovation that the Internet can bring to debates centers on the capacity of citizens to submit questions, to vote on questions to be asked, and then to comment and rate the debate. The latter will take place online whether or not the sponsors incorporate it into the event. Indeed, there will be online commentary and online polling on debates that lack any Internet presence whatsoever. This suggests that campaigns should be sure to marshal their supporters to participate in post-debate spin-for-all.



MAKE YOUR CASE THROUGH CONTRASTS.

Everyone, it seems, hates negative campaigning: the public, the media, the academy, and even campaigners themselves, who “go negative on the negative” (that is, attack opponents for attacking them) as a matter of course. Despite the extensive disgust, attacks are here to stay. Well they should. It’s hard to see how any challenger can win office without publicly criticizing the performance, and even the character, of the incumbent. Although some negative messages deserve condemnation for poor taste or disinformation, others provoke our democracy to make important shifts in leadership. The Declaration of Independence was, for the most part, an attack on King George III.

We believe the existence of the Web will reduce the overall effectiveness of negative advertisements in campaigns. That’s because the news media, civic organizations, and campaigns will increasingly construct sites pinning attack ads to Web pages, where, like butterflies, they can be dissected by anyone, at any time. Exaggerated attacks that rely upon horror-show techniques and factual distortions will backfire more often than in the age of the “drive-by” negative. The same goes for saccharine family spots. If there’s a false claim or a syrupy aftertaste to your positive message, you’ll have a harder time of it now that the Internet is here to put everything in fuller contexts.

Contrast techniques constitute a better method of framing the choice for voters. The Web favors low-key, information-rich comparisons and contrasts. In commerce, the top sites offer price shopping, reviews of merchandise written by experts and lay people, and computer-assisted matching of consumer specifications to products. Tables and lists make thorough comparisons possible at a glance.

As a candidate, you are going to be subjected to these kinds of graphic displays, as posted by third parties and perhaps your opponents. So you might as well seize the day, and *put forth contrast messages on your own terms*. Show the public how and why you will serve them better than your rivals, issue by issue, point by point, in side-by-side formats. >>>

HOW DO I DEAL WITH MY OPPONENTS ONLINE?

Let’s begin with defense. Today it should be standard practice to enter a person’s name into a mega-search engine such as Google before beginning a work relationship with that person. Make sure you know what the first few pages of search engine links apprise you about the key members of your campaign and the competition.

Researchers for your opponents – official and otherwise – will delve beneath the search engine returns on the names of campaign principals. They will assemble digital dossiers comprising personal data on public utterances, financial investments, court appearances, employment histories, and more. Through multiple keyword searches, they will hunt for conflicts of interest and apparent conflicts of interest. They will take note of private embarrassments and be ready to cite them if they can make an issue position or character testimonial look hypocritical. The smartest among the researchers will venture beyond the data and figure out ways to attack your campaign on the basis of what is missing and ought to be present (e.g., the one county in the district not visited by the candidate, the four years not accounted for in the resume). Then, as your campaign hits full stride, your opponents will send surveillance teams to your events in order to record your remarks, note your acquaintances, and juxtapose that immediate data against the data in their files on you.

When researchers find, juxtapose, and synthesize information they can attack you with, they will release it in any number of online channels: news media, chat rooms, e-mail, and perhaps in auxiliary Web sites, once removed from their campaign Web sites, dedicated to going on the offensive against you. For example, when George W. Bush gave a speech in Iowa prior to the caucuses there in January 2000, he talked about the time when he stole a Christmas wreath as a college prank. A columnist for the *Waterloo Courier* covered the event, whereupon Bush opponent Steve Forbes promptly shipped the column to 42,000 people on his e-mail list.

The antagonistic Web sites will get the most public attention, especially if you take the bait and complain about your detractors. Yet the graver damage may be done not by your opponents *per se* but by carelessly indifferent individuals who, in hearing or reading something nasty about you, pass it along

without knowing how true, complete, or fair it is. These blows against your campaign will go partially undiscovered. (You should mobilize online volunteers to help you look for them.)

What can you do to protect your campaign's good name? As we pointed out in Best Practice E, transparency is a good antidote to hostile and misbegotten information. You can go further than explaining the laws and regulations and showing you abide by them and provide cutaway views of your campaign at work: "Here's how our campaign raises money." "Here's how the candidate insists that the campaign conduct research." "Here's the listening and reasoning that went into the vote for that legislation." Another good reason for you to have a privacy policy along the lines of Best Practice D is to refute, in advance, a charge of hypocrisy in the event you must defend your own campaign's privacy.

What about going on the offensive? That question brings us to Best Practice F.

HOW DO I DEAL WITH THE VOTERS ONLINE?

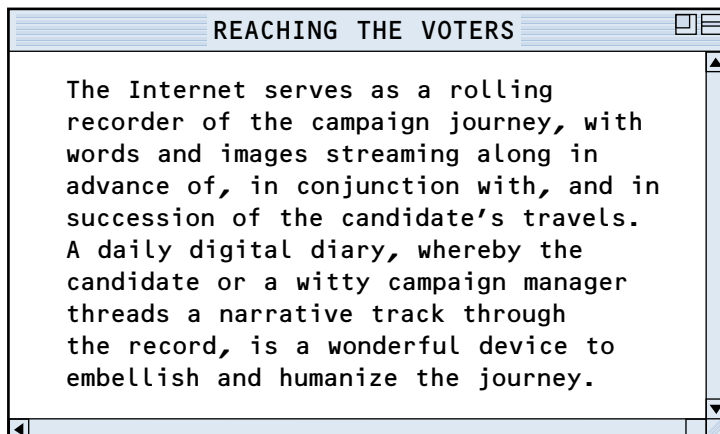
The most successful online campaigns to date have developed a rhythmic sequence to cultivate popular support among the electorate. The sequence begins with the campaign team and network drumming up local interest in the candidate's next appearance through e-mail and other interpersonal channels of communication. The accent comes on the second beat, the appearance at the local school, plant, or mall; campaign workers gather as many new names and e-mail addresses as possible during the event. The third beat consists of follow-ups: individual thank-you messages, complete with digital photos commemorating the meeting with the candidate, invitations to join the campaign, and, at the right time, reminders to get out and vote. The Internet serves as a rolling recorder of the campaign journey, with words and images streaming along in advance of, in conjunction with, and in succession of the candidate's travels. A daily digital diary, whereby the candidate or a witty campaign manager threads a narrative track through the record, is a wonderful device to embellish and humanize the journey.

Notice the sustained importance of campaign workers to voter contact. We think the Internet enhances, rather than replaces, this traditionally labor-intensive aspect of campaigning for office. And we discuss the Internet's vital role in recruiting and mobilizing workers in the next section.

Notice, too, the relative lack of importance of the campaign Web site. At the end of November, 2000, a Pew survey found that although 33 percent of Net users had used the medium to get election news and information, only 7 percent had visited a campaign Web site. So it is up to you to get them to hear the campaign message via the rest of the Web, e-mail, and offline publicity. Your Web site will occasionally seal the deal for genuinely independent- and curious-minded voters. But rarely will it open or sustain the persuasive pitch.

We recommend dividing the contents of your campaign Web site home page and your e-mail newsletters into thirds. (The technique echoes the traditional division of a newspaper front page among international, national, and local news.) One-third should state the basic message of the campaign: here is the candidate, here is the office sought, here is the campaign slogan encapsulating why the candidate is the best among those seeking the office. This part of the home page should rarely change. One-third should present the latest "campaign news" demonstrating the success of the campaign. This can be poll results, endorsements, a new ad or press release – anything to demonstrate the vitality of the campaign and the currency of the Web site. And one-third should be devoted to the rolling record of the candidate's travels through the district.

Sometimes, big news takes over the entire front page of a newspaper. The same goes for your campaign Web site and should be cause to send special e-mail alerts to your entire roster of lists. This should occur when breaking news in the real world coincides with – indeed, can be said to prove out – one of the issue positions dramatizing the contrast between you and your main opponent. The reason for this, as described

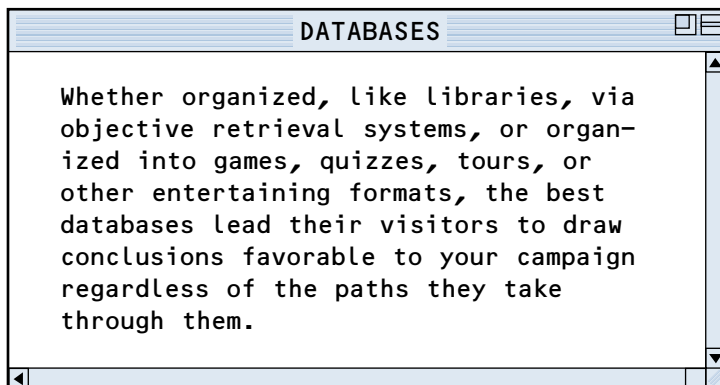


in section 10, stems from the capacity of the Net to maximize your momentum out of a “magic moment.” Such a moment may not happen when you want it or most need it. But if it does, you should be ready to stop the presses, as it were, and remake your home page and e-mail correspondence.

Finally, you need to decide how and when to respond to what may very well strike your campaign as incoming spam: unsolicited e-mails from voters. Taking a page from our colleagues at the Congress Online Project (www.congressonlineproject.org), we suggest an automatic response thanking people for their interest and instructing them on a better way to contact the campaign. The better way, of course, is through the contact forms you set up on your campaign Web site, which enable you to screen out nonlocals, mass-generated mail, and nonserious mail. The remaining fraction of e-mail can be read first by volunteers for further filtering. There is software on the market to assist you with this process; most programs will generate feedback reports as they sort and respond.

HOW DO I MANAGE MY ONLINE CAMPAIGN TEAM AND NETWORK?

A campaign consists of a team of paid staff and other trusted insiders and a network of volunteers who have signed up for campaign e-mail and agreed to take on various tasks. Although the technology of lists assures prompt and thorough delivery of task notices to team and network members, it does not, obviously, ensure that those who receive the notice mobilize in sufficient numbers, and with the requisite skills, to accomplish the tasks. For that, you need supervision and exhortation by list managers, the field coordinators of online campaigning.



< Best Practice G >

PROVIDE INTERACTIVE AND INTERPERSONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The Net can help your campaign turn visitors into subscribers, subscribers into volunteers, and volunteers into achievers. In any medium or setting, people getting other people excited remains fundamental to ratcheting up interest and action. The Net presents campaigns with some new ways to turn up the heat, which are collectively known as “interactive features.”

Interactivity is one of the great distinguishing qualities of the Internet. Many people use the word to mean two-way communication, but interactivity encompasses more than the most familiar modes of two-way communication, namely conversation and correspondence. People can engage in interactive communication without knowing or sensing anything specific about the person(s) on the other side of the computer screen. That impersonality can be a timesaver for campaigns, but to really engage your visitors, you must take steps to leaven your Net operation's interactive features with interpersonal opportunities.

Start with the first-time visitor to your campaign Web site. In this setting, interactivity optimally resembles the relationship between a library and its visitors. As the “content provider,” you set up databases of information and an indexing system. Visitors search the databases on their own time and in their own ways. Then you study the records, or “log files,” of the visits. Smart providers incorporate what they learn about traffic patterns through their databases into the next edition, or version, of their site.

Whether organized, like libraries, via objective retrieval systems, or organized into games, quizzes, tours, or other entertaining formats, the best databases lead their visitors to draw conclusions favorable to your campaign regardless of the paths they take through them. We have already cited opensecrets.org; no matter what information visitors retrieve from its databases, they are apt to conclude that money exerts undue influence in politics. On a smaller but no less effective scale, Republican candidates have made it easy for Web site visitors and, for that matter, banner ad viewers, to calculate their savings from proposed tax reductions. For other highly persuasive databases, see those constructed by the Environmental Working Group at www.ewg.org.

All the same, persuasion is one thing, and activation quite another. Registered voters who favor your candidate do you no good if they do not show up at the polls on Election Day. By the same token, at this opening interface, Web site visitors do not expect prompt, unique, and sustained dialogues with the content providers any more than visitors to a library do. They enjoy the freedom to browse. Now and then, however, they will want help finding something. So construct a help desk that includes, along with a database of answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) a way for a Web visitor to have an exchange with a member of your campaign team. ***You should provide the name of a contact person and an offline method to reach the campaign.*** This can be a regular mailing address, toll-free numbers for voice mail and faxes, or the address of an office with the hours it is open. The point is, a campaign that interacts with online visitors solely through the Net overly restricts human contact. And that is a liability for you as well as for democratic politics. (There is a big difference between online communication when both parties have met, even briefly, and when they have not.)

The next level of interaction begins with visitors granting your campaign permission to send them information. Now they are on your list, as subscribers. Now you should move to learn more about the issues and activities of special interest to them. You can acquire this information through check-box forms. Some campaigns insert these forms at the point of joining a list, but we believe that that act should be made as quick and easy for someone to complete as possible. This is a balancing act for each campaign to experiment with and optimize over time. A fun way to obtain this information is via online polls, with instant tabulation so respondents can see how their issue preferences compare with others who have responded. Be sure to append a disclaimer near the poll that says something to the effect of, "This poll is not scientific, and the results do not necessarily reflect of the position of the campaign."

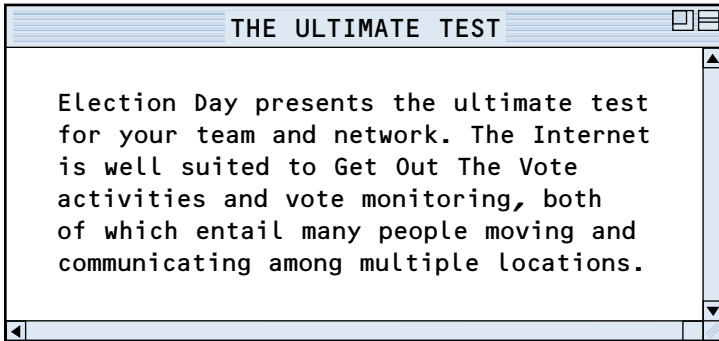
However much you ask about a subscriber at an interface, when you ask for money, again, permit offline and/or interpersonal methods of giving. That means installing a ***contribution system that provides both a secure online method (such that the lock symbol appears on the donor's screen) and an offline alternative.*** Not everyone owns a credit card or knows how to use one online. For that matter, not everyone feels comfortable using his or her credit card online.

A similar mix of interactive and interpersonal options should be tendered to volunteers. ***Post a menu of sample volunteer activities, both online and offline, so that people have an idea of how they can help.*** This menu need not be a check-off form. People may not be sure what they want to do, and you do not want them to limit the array of things that they wind up doing for you. Some will send "e-postcards" to friends. Others will monitor the news media and discussion forums to report what is being said about the campaign and candidate. Others will help with advance work for events. Others will download campaign logos that can be taped to cardboard and placed in a window. Others will make phone calls to help you gauge the extent and level of voter support in a precinct.

Regardless of what people choose to do, they should be thanked at least once, directly, preferably through interpersonal channels. It is also a best practice to ***thank some volunteers by posting evidence of their work on the Net, with their permission.*** The evidence can be quantitative: counters that tabulate participation achievements. It can also be anecdotal. Just as people love to see their letters to the editor in the newspaper and will bring homemade signs to ball games in hopes of getting their faces on television, so, too, will they do things to get their names, and faces, online. Evidence of positive results can inspire greater and wider efforts.

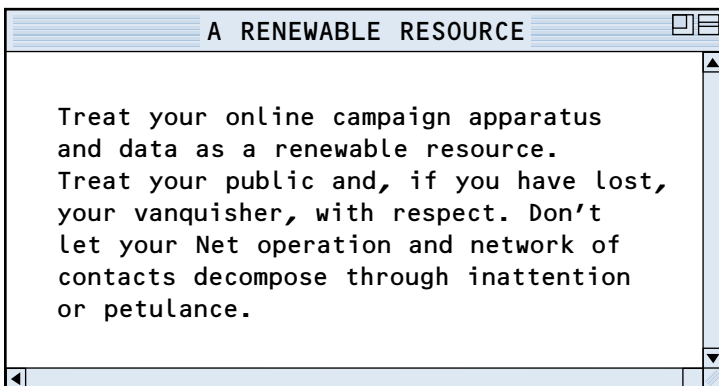
Finally, volunteers will have questions and suggestions, just as site visitors do. But it is doubly important that volunteers be able to talk with a campaign staff member or e-precinct captain. Therefore, every activist for your campaign should be welcomed into the network with the name and contact information for a coordinator. This protects your campaign as well as solidifies the bond; you do not want anonymous work done on your behalf.

When a campaign extends interactive features to the public, it signals a willingness to listen and learn from the people. That's a good image for candidates to live up to. >>>



A private Web site can markedly increase the efficiency of your team. Any campaign suffers through days when scheduled meetings, conference calls, document reviews, and other forms of communication are impossible for all to attend; a good private Web site (often referred to, somewhat accurately, as an "intranet") can bring nonattendees up to speed and, in expensive incarnations, into the meeting room. A tiered system of pass codes will be necessary to preserve the confidentiality of your poll data, ad scripts, strategy memos, candid assessments of situations and individuals, and other private information.

Meanwhile, your online volunteer recruitment efforts will run on the public side of your Net operation. The dividing line between your volunteer network and your campaign team should be walked by "e-precinct" leaders: team members and almost-team members in charge of other volunteers. They should be encouraged to use e-mail and text messaging to communicate with their squads on familiar, if not intimate, terms.



It is easy to dispatch alerts but hard to keep people in a state of readiness so they will respond in the time period and manner you want. You must sound urgent enough to cut through the clutter, yet not seem like YOU ARE CRYING WOLF! by resorting to upper-case letters and exclamation points in your e-mail subject lines.

Election Day presents the ultimate test for your team and network. The Internet is well suited to Get Out The Vote activities and vote monitoring, both of which entail many people moving and communicating among multiple locations. For elaborate campaigns, the walk list can be outfitted with forms to fill out and upload, so that maps can be recalculated based on interim results and then redistributed with updated routes. The same circulatory improvements may be made for telephone scripts ("The opposition is turning out in record numbers so we really need your help."), news releases, and legal challenges to the results.

WHAT DO I DO WITH MY NET OPERATION AFTER THE ELECTION?

Win or lose, keep your data and URLs. Reduce your campaign Web site to a home page with contact information and, if you want to remain in public life in some capacity, a sign-up form for e-mail news. The work you have done and the assets you have acquired will continue to pay off while in office, or while planning another try, or even if you did not win and/or do not plan to run again, as a site for grass-roots mobilization and a leadership political action committee.

The Internet is a multi-purpose public-affairs medium. You can mobilize support for causes and candidates you favor. You can enlist your supporters to supply you with intelligence on their experiences and milieus, for government oversight or advocacy research. In short, treat your online campaign apparatus and data as a renewable resource. Treat your public and, if you have lost, your vanquisher, with respect. Don't let your Net operation and network of contacts decompose through inattention or petulance.

As final consideration, if you have been elected to office, you should pay close attention to the rules governing the transfer of information between official and campaign sites. They must remain separate entities, and some transfers are illegal and/or unethical.

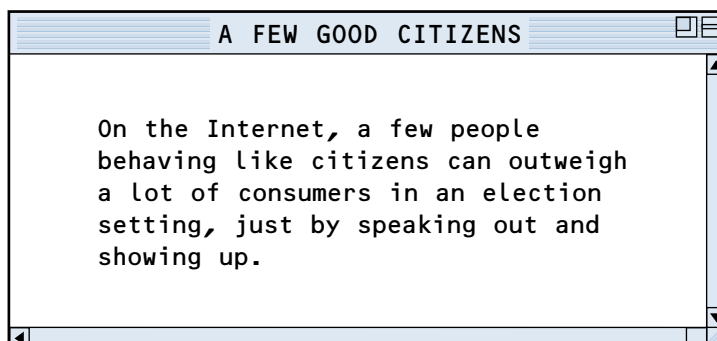
We have argued in this Primer that a good Internet campaign needs to use all of the tools the medium makes available: a campaign Web site, the rest of the Web, e-mail, text messaging, and computer databases. That is why we have referred to your "Net operation" instead of just your Web site. For maximum economy and impact, your uses of Internet technology should conform to a strategy that sets out goals and roles in terms of three managerial processes: one for content, one for lists, and one for security. Big-budget campaigns might assign one person to captain each process. But they, along with their less financially fortunate counterparts, will still want several campaign figures involved in each process, including people whose main responsibilities lie in offline campaigning. Overlapping groups of campaign principals, staff, vendors, and consultants, themselves loosely grouped into an online campaign team, will outperform hierarchically organized individuals in using the Internet.

We have also argued that when it comes to determining the details of those processes and the goods they generate, smart campaigners will put "idealism" on an equal footing with "realism." That is to say, when on the verge of a decision, the justification that this is how campaigns ought to be should not crumple before the justification that this is how everyone has won in the past. For there is not much realism to draw on with respect to a complex technology that has only been around the election track three times (1996-2000). Furthermore, realism demands secrecy, and for better and worse, there is precious little of that online. Realism also depends on people behaving like consumers, limited to the choices presented to them. On the Internet, however, a few people behaving like citizens can outweigh a lot of consumers in an election setting, just by speaking out and showing up.

It is a time-honored staple of rhetoric to urge people to do things "for the sake of their children." We are happy to sustain that tradition. The next generation of American citizens is going to learn about politics primarily through the computer screen, much as the baby boomers (whose great numbers they echo) learned about it through the television screen. A 1999 study commissioned by the National Association

of Secretaries of State, found that American youth love the Internet but "suffer an information and skill deficit about politics and the process of voting." To campaigns that put their best arguments forward online, that are willing to experiment with new techniques in a new multimedia environment, and that have the self-confidence to campaign by extending trust, will go the recognition and power consonant with being the leaders of the rising cohort groups in the electorate. There are no guarantees of anything online. But the Internet confers on its users the capacity to recognize costs and benefits in a twinkling and to adjust in nearly the same instant.

We are publishing this Primer in that enthusiastic and flexible spirit. Let us know what you think of it, what you do online, and what happens as a consequence.





BEST PRACTICES CHECKLIST

Best Practice A: Make Your Web site Accessible to Everyone.

- Ensure your campaign Web site's essential online materials are accessible to the disabled.
- Ensure your campaign Web site's essential online materials adhere to the federal standards for ballot translation.

Best Practice B: Document Your Positions.

- Substantiate your major issue positions on your campaign Web site, either directly or via links.

Best Practice C: Exhibit and Extend Your Community Ties.

- Display, and/or link to, your candidate's memberships, endorsements, and testimonials from nonaffiliated citizens.
- Display or link to voter information for your district.

Best Practice D: Develop, Post, and Live by A Privacy Policy.

- Post a statement about your privacy policy on your campaign Web site.
- Include an "unsubscribe" option on your e-mails.
- Ask individuals to consent to each category by which your campaign will collect, use, and release data about them.
- Ensure your privacy policy explicitly covers individuals contacted on your behalf.
- Ensure your privacy policy establishes a line of responsibility for data you possess about individuals, a line that extends beyond the life of your campaign.
- Provide contact information for privacy matters.

Best Practice E: Explain the Rules, and Show You Comply.

- Make all legally required disclosures available and understandable through your campaign Web site.
- Ensure your disclaimer appears on your e-mails as well as your Web site.

Best Practice F: Make Your Case Through Contrasts.

- Put forth contrast messages on your own terms.

Best Practice G: Provide Interactive and Interpersonal Opportunities.

- Provide the name of a contact person and an offline method to reach the campaign.
- Install a contribution system that provides both a secure online method (such that the lock symbol appears on the donor's screen) and an offline alternative.
- Supply a menu of sample volunteer activities, both online and offline, so people have an idea of how they can help.
- Thank some volunteers by posting evidence of their work on the Net, with their permission.

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GOLDEN DOT AWARDS

The Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet (formerly the Democracy Online Project) presents its Golden Dot Awards to outstanding political online campaigns at its Annual Politics Online Conference. Within the online politics community, the Golden Dot Awards are well known. As online politics becomes more integrated in our political system overall, it is hoped that the Golden Dot Awards will ideally achieve similar recognition throughout American society.

The Institute alternates year by year between the areas of online election politics and online issue advocacy politics. In those years when the topic area is online election politics, winners are organizations that have used the Internet in exemplary ways to promote a candidate for elective office. Most of these organizations are candidate campaigns themselves. In those years when the topic area is online issue advocacy politics, winners are organizations that have used the Internet in exemplary ways to promote a cause, which could be an effort in favor or against a particular piece of legislation or a rally in Washington.

Golden Dot Awards are given in six areas: Innovation, Message, Interactivity, Transparency, Public Support, and Grand Prize. The different award categories (each of which has a series of criteria) serve the same functions that the "best practices" serve in the Institute's *Online Campaign Primer, 2002*. They single out those qualities that both help organizations succeed in their efforts and that uphold democratic principles and values.

Nominations for Golden Dot Awards are accepted from anyone, including organizations that wish to nominate themselves. A panel of judges from outside the Institute is assembled to choose the winners in the six categories, and a committee is assembled from within the Institute to screen nominations for eligibility and for making a first cut.

For more information about the awards, selection criteria or list of past winners, visit our Web site, www.ipdi.org/goldendots.

Please photocopy, sign and return to the Institute by fax at 202.994.6006.



BEST PRACTICES PLEDGE

"WE SUPPORT THE IPDI BEST PRACTICES FOR ONLINE CAMPAIGNING."

Name: _____

Campaign: _____

Campaign URL: _____

Date: _____

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